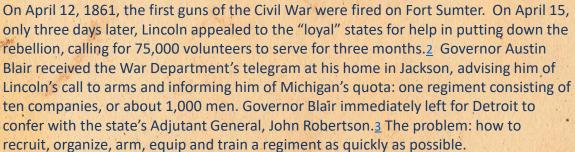




"Thank God for Michigan!"

It is confidently expected that the patriotic citizen soldiery of Michigan will promptly come forward to enlist in the cause of the Union, against which an extensive rebellion in arms exists, threatening the integrity and perpetuity of the government.

Governor and Commander-in-Chief Austin Blair April 16, 1861



There were no funds for such an undertaking. Michigan's treasury in 1861 was nearly depleted. Prominent business and civic leaders around the state stepped forward, pledging \$80,000 in loans to get Michigan's war effort started.4

On April 16, one day after receiving the War Department's telegram, Governor Blair called for volunteers. The response was wildly enthusiastic, marked by a massive war



Governor Austin Blair

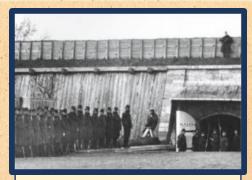


Adjutant General John Robertson









The Regiment training at Fort Wayne, Detroit

rally in Detroit. Similar mass meetings and rallies swept the state, followed by a mad dash to enlist. Although there was nothing like a state army, there were twenty-eight volunteer militia companies scattered around Michigan, including the Detroit Light Guard, the Dexter Union Guard, the Flint Union Grays and the East Saginaw Guard. Although often more social than military in nature, the militia had at least some training. To meet Lincoln's quota as quickly as possible, Governor Blair gave preference to these companies. If there were more volunteers, Blair decided, they would be formed into extra regiments—just in case they might be needed in the future. Then, on April 17, Virginia seceded from the Union, followed by other states. The war had begun.

On April 29, 1861, ten companies—the Detroit Light Guard, the Jackson Grays, the Coldwater Cadets, the Manchester Union Guard, the Steuben Guard, the Michigan Hussars, the Burr Oak Guard, the

Ypsilanti Light Guard, the Marshall Light Guard and the Hardee Cadets—
rendezvoused at Fort Wayne to drill and train. 7 Colonel Frank W. Whittlesey of Ypsilanti left for New York to purchase uniforms and camp equipment. Families, friends and curious onlookers came from miles around to watch. On May 1, 798 officers and men were mustered into federal service as the First



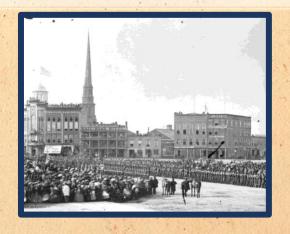
Orlando B. Willcox

Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The colonel in command was <u>Orlando Willcox</u>, a West Point graduate and army veteran. The term of service: three months, "unless sooner disbanded." <u>8</u> General opinion was that the insurrection would be handily put down and it would all be over in a few weeks.

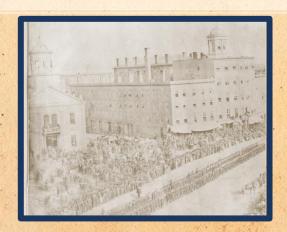
On May 11, 1861, an impressive ceremony took place opposite Detroit City Hall in Campus Martius, the huge public square downtown. Thousands attended: indeed, onlookers hung from every window and lined every rooftop surrounding the square. The regiment had been transported by ferry from Fort Wayne and now, resplendent in new uniforms, it marched smartly through the streets to the square. Here the regiment conducted a dress







The First Michigan Volunteer
Infantry Regiment (Three Months)
receiving its colors from the ladies
of Detroit.



parade ceremony and formed a huge hollow square.

Court Recorder Henry A. Morrow (who later became the colonel of the Twenty-Fourth Michigan Volunteer Infantry Regiment) addressed the regiment. Ten young ladies were introduced, one to each company, placing in the hands of each man a red, white and blue rosette. 9

Company A, the Jackson Greys, had been designated the color company, and now it was called forward. Colonel Willcox summoned Color Sergeant William Holloway, Jr. and the Reverend D. Bethune Duffield placed a beautiful blue silk banner in his hands, the gift of the ladies of Detroit. 10

The flag was magnificent. It was described as a "very heavy silk (flag) fringed with gold. Upon one side is the United States coat of arms, with the state coat of arms on the reverse over which are the words, 'Michigan's Daughters to Her Sons, Defend It.'" 11 This account is actually in error: defying regulations, the state arms appear on the front of this flag and the federal arms on the back. Also defying regulations, which called for infantry regiments to carry two flags, a regimental like the one described above and a national red, white, and blue "stars and stripes," newspaper accounts and records maintain that only the regimental was presented. 12 However—further adding to the confusion—a rare photograph of the event appears to show a stars and stripes being presented, not the regimental so glowingly described by the press. Whichever it was, Dr. Duffield placed a benediction on the banner, the regiment saluted it smartly, and the First marched away with its prize. 13





Two days later, on May 13, the regiment boarded the steamer "May Queen" and pulled away from shore with the Detroit Light Guard Band playing "The Girl I Left Behind Me." Thousands cheered and wished the regiment Godspeed. 14 Disembarking in Cleveland, the regiment proceeded by railroad to Harrisburg, then Baltimore. Along the way, they were greeted with considerable enthusiasm and admiration, offered food and, from the women, even kisses and locks of hair. The Cleveland Plain Dealer reported, "A great many of our citizens visited them and expressed admiration of the men and the very admirable way they had been armed and equipped by their State. The comparison between the action of Michigan and that of Ohio was not at all flattering." 15 The Baltimore American added, "The Michigan regiment attracted general attention and commendation by their solid appearance and well-disciplined movements... It was composed almost entirely of young, steady, and intelligent-looking men, and it appeared to be capitally officered. They were exceedingly well-equipped, thanks to the liberality of the State of Michigan, which had furnished them with an entire outfit from head to foot, and were armed with new minie guns. The Pennsylvanians were armed with the old percussion lock musket." 16 Such accolades were particularly notable since Baltimore was not always well-disposed toward Union troops. In fact, the regiment had risked attack by hostile

On May 16, the regiment arrived in Washington, exactly one month and one day after Lincoln's call to arms. According to the May 17 New York Post, "The regiment came into town about 10 o'clock last night, marching from the depot up the avenue to Eleventh Street. They were preceded by a splendid band of music, which soon aroused our citizens, and long before they had reached the quarters assigned to them hundreds of people were out to give them welcome. The enthusiasm of the crowd was irrepressible, for this was the first western regiment which had arrived at the Capital." 17

citizens just in marching from one rail depot in the city to another.

"The regiment reached Washington at a critical time," wrote Adjutant General John Robertson in his 1882 *Michigan In The War:* "when Confederate troops flaunted their flag on Arlington Heights, claiming defiant equality with the old banner of freedom floating from the National Capitol . . . The cheers of the loyal thousands greeted [the regiment] as American patriots and as friends in a time of great need. 18 President



The ribbon on the top of <u>SC-228-90</u> reads "Michigan Daughters to Her Sons.

Defend It."





Lincoln personally greeted the regiment and reportedly said, "Thank God for Michigan!" 19

The First lingered only briefly in the capital, but their time there included a review by President Lincoln. As they paraded down Pennsylvania Avenue on May 18, the President "expressed himself highly gratified with their martial air." 20 By May 24, the regiment had crossed into Virginia, taking possession of Alexandria with the loss of one man who was shot "by a person in a house," according to Colonel Willcox." 21

Soon after, noting that the First lacked a national flag (supporting the press accounts that only a regimental was presented to the regiment in Detroit), three former Detroiters living in Washington—J.M. Edmunds, Wm. A. Howard, and Dr. H.J. Alvord—formed a committee to procure the "stars and stripes" for the regiment. Assessing the cost equally upon themselves they presented the flag to the regiment while it was encamped in Virginia, without ceremony and with only two words: "Defend it." The regiment's equally laconic response: "We will." That flag was the first to float over Alexandria in place of "secession bunting." 22

On July 21, 1861, along Bull Run near Manassas, Virginia, only 25 miles from Washington, the First participated in what was really its first—and last—battle. Michigan's powerful United States Senator Zachariah Chandler and members of Congress—along with hundreds of curious civilians with picnic hampers—had come to watch the battle, expecting an easy victory. 23 But instead of a

victory, it was a rout, a disaster, a fiasco— and a resounding defeat for the Union. The inexperience of Michigan troops showed. During a lull in the battle, Confederate artillery fired their cannon across a wide meadow. For sport, several



The Battle of Bull Run

Union soldiers ran alongside the nearly-spent cannon balls. Color Sergeant Calvin Colgrove of Marshall was struck in the head by a wayward ball and died instantly. Colgrove was the first Michigan color sergeant killed during the Civil War.24 Years later, in 1902, Union veterans built a Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) hall in Marshall and named it in his honor.25

But, despite its inexperience, the First acquitted itself admirably, falling back only after fierce resistance. Battle reports show that the First held the most advanced Union position of any regiment and that "the Michigan dead were found nearest the enemy works." 26 Borne by Color Sergeant Maetzke, the colors were carried twice into the thickest of the battle, and twice the regiment was forced back by overwhelming numbers. Colonel Willcox rallied the men, retook a battery, and held it against great odds until he was wounded. Finally, outnumbered and cut off from retreat, the regiment was reluctantly obliged to surrender. 27





According to the *Detroit Free Press*, "the gallant Sergeant still kept his colors flying, and it was only when the little band surrendered that the colors were given up by their faithful defender to the enemy, by whom, with the gallant men over whom they had waved, they were taken to Richmond." 28 Of the 500 men of the regiment who had gone into battle, there were 117 casualties. Among those taken prisoner was Colonel Willcox, who was awarded the Medal of Honor in 1895 for "[leading] repeated charges until wounded and taken prisoner" at the Battle of Bull Run.29

And what of the regiment's beautiful regimental battle flag—the first ever presented to a Michigan regiment? It also suffered an ignoble fate—it was captured by the 27th Virginia Infantry Regiment and sent as a war trophy to the capital of the Confederacy at Richmond. According to the *Detroit Free Press*, "A lady at present stopping in this city [Detroit], has just received a letter from her husband, who resides in Richmond, dated July 29th, which says: 'Tell your Michigan friends that we have their Colonel, their colors, and lots of prisoners.'"30

The First's national flag, however, escaped capture and surrender to the Confederate forces. Robertson reports that, "This flag was saved from capture at Bull Run and brought from the field by Corporal Thomas Flynn, of Company G, who was honored with carrying it on the first dress parade following. It was brought back to Michigan with the regiment, and is now deposited in the State archives."31



SC-4-90

It is believed that the national shown here (SC-4-90) is that flag. SC-4-90 is a 34-star flag, indicating it was manufactured early in the war before West Virginia became the 35th state in 1863, so it could have easily been presented to the regiment in 1861. Also, typical of flags presented in the field rather than in formal ceremonies back home, the flag is plain and

unembellished, lacking even the name of the regiment painted in gold on the fourth red stripe. Very likely it was pressed into service too quickly for the regiment's quartermaster to find someone to add this necessary embellishment. Finally, most of the flags returned to the state in 1866 after the conclusion of the war were marked with identical brass plaques attached to their staffs. Unlike those, <u>SC-4-90</u> has an unusual metal band inscribed, "First Reg't. Infantry." This helps strengthen the possibility that the flag was returned to the state before the 1866 ceremony, probably when the regiment returned to Michigan.

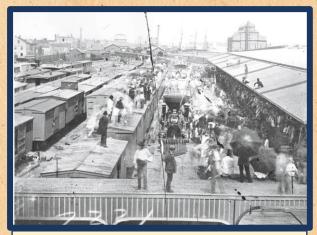
The regiment returned in August 1861, when what remained of





of the First returned home at the end of its three months' enlistment. Despite the defeat at Bull Run, the men were given a hero's welcome and thousands greeted them at the at the railroad station on Brush Street. 32 The great statesman, Lewis Cass himself, was there to greet the regiment. 33 Before long many of the men had reenlisted in the three-year regiments then forming. In fact, the First Michigan (three years) Regiment began organizing in June, long before the First (three months) returned to the state, and when the new regiment left for war in September, many of its officers were veterans of Bull Run. 34

What happened to the First's captured flag? After the war, captured Union flags discovered in Richmond were not



Greeting the remnant of the First at the Brush Street Depot in Detroit at the end of its three months' service, Aug 1861.



A rally and speeches honor the First upon it's return. Former Michigan Territorial Governor and United States Senator Lewis Cass is on the platform.

returned to their states. Instead, they were forwarded to Washington D.C. where they were stored in boxes in a vacant room in the attic of a building on 17th Street occupied by clerks working for the Adjutant General. In 1867, without authorization, the War Department's buildings supervisor moved the flags to his office, where he displayed some on the walls and the rest in pigeonholes or on shelves. The flags were inventoried, however, including a description of each flag and a brief history of its capture, if known.35

In response to complaints that the flags were not on public display, the Secretary of War in 1874 and 1875 ordered that some,







be placed on exhibit in the Ordnance Museum in Winder's Building on 17th Street near the White House. Most, however, remained in the buildings superintendent's office. Then, in 1882, the Secretary of War directed all the flags boxed and stored in the subbasement of the State, War, and Navy Building on Pennsylvania Avenue, which was still under construction. This space proved inaccessible and the flags stored there began decaying rapidly, so they were removed from their boxes and moved once again to an upper floor in the same building.36

In the meantime, veterans who had served in Union regiments were petitioning the government for the return of their captured flags. For the First Michigan Infantry, it was particularly painful that its flag—the very first battle flag presented to the very first Michigan regiment — had ended as a trophy of war. But returning such a flag took time and effort. The governor of a Union state could petition for its return, but first the Secretary of War had to determine that its capture did not "reflect discredit upon the soldierly and gallant conduct of the troops." 37 In other words, had the regiment broken its sacred vow to defend its flags in battle? Did the veterans deserve to get them back?

Fortunately for the First, its petitioner was Michigan governor and Civil War hero Russell Alger. Former colonel of the Fifth Michigan Cavalry, wounded twice in battle, his petition for the return of the First Michigan Infantry flag captured at First Bull Run commanded respect. On April 28, 1886, the United States Office of the Adjutant General notified Governor Alger of the decision to send the flag to

him. The letter accompanying the flag stated that the "records of this office show that the First Michigan gallantly participated in the action at Bull Run, Virginia, July 21, 1861, losing on that occasion, one hundred seventeen officers and men killed, wounded or missing, and that the flag must have been lost under circumstances reflecting great credit upon the regiment, and under his instruction, the flag in question has this day been forwarded to your address." 38

Upon receipt, the governor immediately sent the flag—along with a note of congratulations to the "old First"—to General William H. Withington of Jackson.39 Withington had served as captain in the

First, been captured at Bull Run, and later became the colonel of the 17th Michigan Infantry. The flag apparently arrived in time for the regiment's May 5, 1886, reunion. On May 10, 1886, General Withington forwarded the flag to the Michigan Adjutant General's office at the Capitol in Lansing, along with a letter stating, "It . blessed the eyes of the old First Michigan boys, who saw it once more after the lapse of twenty- five years."40



William H. Withington



COLOR COMPANY THE FLAG BEARERS



By regulation, every infantry regiment was to be issued a stand of colors, consisting of two flags: a national (the familiar "Stars and Stripes") and a regimental (similar to the Michigan state flag, except that Michigan's coat-of-arms was usually replaced by the federal coat-of-arms, its outstretched eagle a powerful symbol of the Union the regiment was fighting to preserve). Measuring six and one half feet by six feet and borne on ten foot staffs, bearing the regiment's name emblazoned in gold, and made of brilliant silk fringed and tasseled, these huge banners were designed to be easily seen and instantly recognized by every man of the regiment.

One company (approximately 100 men) was designated as the color company and was charged with the primary responsibility of guarding and carrying the flags into battle. From within the color company, the color bearers (who were most often noncommissioned officers) were selected for their military bearing, their exemplary moral character—and their bravery. The color company was placed in the center of the battle line and set the pace and direction of the regiment, with hundreds of men "guiding on the colors." During the noise, confusion and smoke of battle, the flags were in the thick of the action. Men caught up in the melee looked to their colors to maintain their position and to prevent becoming separated from their regiment. Thus, the size and brilliance of the flags is easily understood: they had to be highly visible and instantly identifiable. Held aloft where all could see them, flags rallied the regiment in moments of confusion and despair and infused them with renewed determination.

Both Union and Confederate flags became instant targets of fierce enemy fire as each side realized that the simplest way to demoralize and disorient an opposing regiment was to shoot down its flag—or the person carrying it. The greatest casualties of the war both north and south—were suffered by those who carried the flags in battle. It was not unusual for a flag to be shot to tatters in a single engagement, its staff struck and shattered, and bearer after bearer killed or wounded. Every member of the color company—and, indeed, every member of the regiment— was expected to sacrifice his life, if necessary, to prevent the loss of the regiment's flags in battle. Unimaginable acts of heroism were associated with their defense. The loss of a flag to the enemy meant humiliation and disgrace for the regiment. Conversely, capturing an enemy flag brought honor and fame. The Medal of Honor was instituted during the Civil War to honor Union troops for acts of extreme bravery. Sixty-nine Michigan men eventually received the medal—most through petition long after the war was over—for a variety of heroic actions. Only thirteen received it during the war, all for the capture of an enemy flag.



COLOR COMPANY THE FLAG BEARERS



The following individuals can be documented as having served in the regiment's color guard. Their names appear in the Civil War Service Records Collection at the Archives of Michigan and on the Michianology website https://michiganology.org/civil-war/

Calvin Colegrove. "Enlisted in company I, First Infantry, April 22, 1861, at Marshall, for 3 months, age 32. Mustered May 1, 1861. Corporal. Killed in action at Bull Run, Va., July 21, 1861." 41

Thomas Flynn. "Three Rivers. Enlisted in company G, First Infantry, April 24, 1861, at Burr Oak, for three months, age 20. Mustered May 1, 1861. Mustered out at Detroit, Mich., Aug. 7, 1861. Re-entered service in company E, Eleventh Infantry, at organization, as First Lieutenant. Commissioned Aug. 24, 1861. Mustered Aug. 24, 1861. Commissioned Captain Nov. 15, 1862. Killed in action at Stone River, Tenn., Dec. 31, 1862." 42

William Holloway. "Enlisted in company A, First Infantry, as Corporal, April 18, 1861, at Detroit, for 3 months, age 32. Mustered May 1, 1861. Regimental Color Sergeant at formation of regiment. Mustered out at Detroit, Mich., Aug. 7, 1861." 43

Edwin Livermore. "Enlisted in company B, First Infantry, April 29, 1861, at Jackson, for 3 months, age 27. Mustered May 1, 1861. Discharged for disability at Alexandria, Va., June 6, 1861. Fell from a flagstaff while in the line of duty." 44

William Maetzke. "Enlisted in company D, First Infantry, as Corporal, April 29, 1861, at Manchester, for 3 months, age 27. Mustered May 1, 1861. Taken prisoner at Bull Run, Va., July 21, 1861. Exchanged. Mustered out May 20, 1862." 45

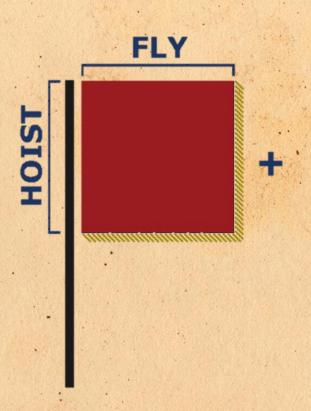


THE FLAGS



Note on Measurements: All dimensions give the height of the flag (called the "hoist" and measured along the staff side of the flag) first, followed by the width (called the "fly" and measured from the outside edge of the sleeve to the flag's free edge). Measurements exclude the fringe, which is measured separately. All measurements are in inches. A plus symbol (+) following a measurement means the flag is fragmentary and once extended further in that direction.

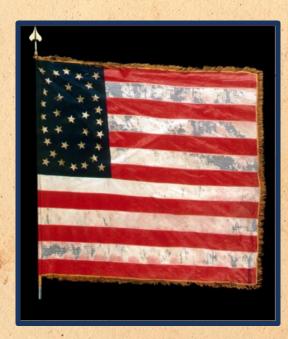
Note on Catalogue Numbers: "SC" refers to the State Capitol (the flags are State Capitol artifacts). The two-digit number at the end refers to the year the flags were catalogued and accessioned by the Michigan Historical Museum.





THE FLAGS





SC-4-90: Silk national. • Dimensions: 73"x77" • Cotton Fringe: 2.5"

The flag has 34 five-pointed, painted gold stars in the blue canton, indicating that it was produced in the early years of the war, prior to West Virginia's entry into the Union in 1863, which added a 35th star. The stars are in two concentric ovals with nine stars in the inner oval, twenty stars in the outer, one star at each corner and one star in the center. In many areas, dye from the red silk stripes has bled onto the white stripes. Fabric on the hoist was fashioned into a sleeve for attachment to the staff.

The staff, which measures 100" long x 1.25" in diameter is intact, with a regulation brass spade finial. The staffs of flags returned to the state at the 1866 Detroit ceremony marking the end of the war all bear identical brass plaques. There is no brass plaque on this staff instead there is a different metal band attached to the staff and inscribed "First Reg't, infantry." This indicates that this flag may have been given to the state at a different time.

The blue and white twisted silk cord measures 128" long and the two 2.5" tassels are formed on wooden cores.

The flag was netted (sewn between layers of dyed nylon net) in the 1960s in an early attempt at conservation.



THE FLAGS







SC-228-90: Silk regimental. • Dimensions: 69.5"x76.5" • Gold Bullion Fringe: 2.5"

The flag is constructed of two pieces of blue silk, each painted separately and sewn together. The obverse (front) is charged with a painted red scroll with the motto, "MICHIGAN'S DAUGHTERS TO HER SONS. DEFEND IT." Below that is a painted rendering of the Michigan coat-of-arms. It features an eagle with outstretched wings clutching in its beak a light blue scroll bearing the national motto in Latin, "E PLURIBUS UNUM" ("Out of Many, One"). The eagle rests atop a shield bearing the Latin motto, "TUEBOR" ("I Will Defend"). The shield features a peninsula, lighthouse, and sailing vessel on the horizon. It is supported on the right by an elk and on the left by a moose, both rampant. Beneath the shield is a light blue scroll painted with the Latin motto, "SI QUAERIS PENINSULAM AMOENAM CIRCUMSPICE" ("If You Seek a Pleasant Peninsula Look About You"). Draped from the scroll is a banner inscribed with the name of the regiment: "1ST. REGT INFTY."

The reverse (back) features a painted rendering of the federal eagle (33.5" from tip of beak to tip of wing) perched on top of the federal shield and displaying arms (that is, arrows) clasped in the right talon and an olive branch in the left. Upon the shield is a blue painted scroll with the national motto in Latin, "E PLURIBUS UNUM" ("Out of Many, One"). Two painted, crossed, national flags complete with tassels, staff and spear finials appear beneath the eagle and behind the shield.

This flag does not have a staff associated with it. The staff in the picture (top) is a staff of the Sixth Michigan that was mistakenly associated with the flag for a time.

The red, white, and blue twisted silk cord measures 95" long and the two red, white and blue 2.5" tassels are formed on wooden cores.

The flag was netted(sewn between layers of dyed nylon net) in the 1960s in an early attempt at conservation.



PHOTOGRAPHS



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Glendenning, Peter, photographer. "SC-228-90" c. 1990. State of Michigan: Save the Flags Collection.

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- (2) Philip P. Mason and Paul J. Pentecost, *From Bull Run to Appomattox: Michigan's Role in the Civil War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1961), 5.
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- (4) John Robertson, Michigan In the War (Lansing: W. S. George and Co. State Printers and Binders, 1882), 17-21.
- (5) Dunbar, Michigan: A History of the Wolverine State, 374.
- (6) "The War." Detroit Free Press, May 1, 1861, 1.
- (7) Robertson, 166.
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- (9) Walter F. Clowes, The Detroit Light Guard: A Complete Record of this Organization from its Founding to the Present Day: With Full Account of Riot and Complementary Duty, and the Campaigns in the Civil and Spanish-American Wars: A Complete Roster of Members at the Time of Muster-Out of the United States Service, as Well as a Roster of All Classes of Members (Detroit, John F. Eby and Co., 1900), 38.
- (10) Ibid.
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- (12) Michigan Argus, May 17, 1861.
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- (23) Arthur T. Pierson, Zachariah Chandler: An Outline Sketch of His Life and Public Services by The Detroit Post and Tribune, (Detroit Post and Tribune, 1880), 210.
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